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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

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RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALUMNAE ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE ETHICS OF THE PROFESSION¹

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IN Florence Nightingale's day there was no profession for women, nothing that was solely woman's work. Her life was spent, as we know, in a supreme effort to emancipate woman, and to create and establish a woman's profession. Little sympathy was extended from either friends or relatives, and her ambitions were realized only after years of untiring interest and study, combined with the courage of her convictions and unflinching faith in woman. Had she had less than these, she would not have been the founder of modern nursing. Her work was dominated by three great ideals: education, harmony, and organization, and because of Miss Nightingale's vision the nursing profession as viewed today is the accomplishment of that ideal, with the many responsibilities and dangers that the fulfillment of an ideal entails, hence the topic assigned to me: "Shall the Alumnae Associations Be Responsible for the Ethics of the Profession?"

In endeavoring to answer the question, let us first consider what we mean by an association. The dictionary defines it as "A group of people working together for a common purpose; fellowship; companionship." We accept this and recognize the value of education in bringing about harmony and organization. Let us also accept the definition for ethics: "The science of human conduct; the basic principles of right action." We know that there are basic principles of right action in all professions, and wherever one deals with the human element, right action is to be determined. But who is to determine for us the basic principles of right action? We recall our earliest hospital experiences in schools of nursing, our first ideas of hospital etiquette and of nursing ethics, and remember that we were taught to follow a code of ethics without question. But when the pupil nurse emerges from school and confronts her problem as an individual to what extent will her dealing with other graduate nurses be influenced by her knowledge of ethics, now that she is no longer under guidance? I believe her conduct will be in direct ratio to the

¹ Read at the annual convention of the New York State Nurses' Association, Utica, October 27, 1921.

ideals she received in her school days, and not in direct ratio to the teaching of set rules. In my opinion the day is long past when ethics can be taught to pupil nurses as negative instruction, nor can it be merely absorbed from those who have preceded, or by the stamped pattern we call tradition. The nurse in training must be taught ideals of sincerity and truth, must come in contact with personalities that inspire, and she should call to her aid the greatest of all powers, that of religious influence and spiritual endowment.

Was it not nursing that gave opportunity for expression of the spiritual ideals that characterized the women of history as nurses of the early periods and should not a broader education in nursing, which gives also a wider range of opportunity for service, give harmony and sincerity of purpose? Most certainly, if we do not lose sight of the spiritual side of nursing which was the star that guided Florence Nightingale, Isabel Hampton Robb, and whose ray is still being followed by the leaders of today.

The nurse upon graduation is received by the community as one of a great group of graduate nurses. Will she emulate the ideals she adhered to in school? We believe she will if in her school days she has been taught to believe that as an individual she is playing a conspicuous part in a big forward movement and can strengthen the ranks by keeping in line. It is sad indeed and most disappointing to know that occasionally a young nurse feels that she can, upon graduation, detach herself from all the ties that bound her to a certain routine life and behavior. She elects to lead her own professional life unmolested and independent, without contact with any of the big inspiring movements that make for progress. She has used every stepping stone to success, but she fails to recognize any obligation or responsibility to others. Again there is the type of nurse who falls in line readily enough while in school, but whose ethical conduct is not above reproach when left to make her own decisions. In training she mechanically accepted the ideals of others, simply following group behavior, but now that she is responsible for her own behavior, she disregards all ethical procedures in her dealings with her colleagues for the gratification of petty desire or personal prejudice, scheming and planning to gain some selfish whim.

After all, it is these little discrepancies that retard us most. They come from a confusion of purposes and a lack of sound ethical principles. This type of young woman needs contact with groups of people who understand the cohesive motive that makes for solidarity as well as progress. Where shall she be directed for such inspiration and who is responsible for her? Is it the duty of the community to keep her ideals for her? The community which expects so

much of graduate nurses expects us to be "intelligent saints," to quote Miss Nightingale. Would we ask that they keep us inspired with the zeal and loyalty that we have failed to keep? No, it is not the responsibility of the community, nor is it any longer the responsibility of the training school, it becomes the duty and responsibility of the alumnae associations that are working together for a common good as comrades and companions to maintain the ideals of education, of harmony, and of organization. This places a grave responsibility upon the shoulders of the presidents. They should be to the graduate what the principal was to the pupil.

Since the president is chosen by graduate nurses, she should be chosen with discretion, and for her ability to inspire, to maintain, and further the education of those with whom she is working. The position commands an inspiring personality, magnetic force, and the courage of conviction. True, she too is following some chosen branch of work in which she is most active, and which makes it very important that each member serving on a committee accept her responsibilities and make a definite and decided contribution to the organization. Unless each officer appointed is chosen according to her fitness for the work in hand, the association will be working at cross purposes and there will be no incentive for the new graduate to join its ranks, contribute her influence, and renew her enthusiasm. The success of this controlling body can only be estimated by this factor plus the absence of individual instances that need consideration for unethical behavior.

Nurses at graduation are full of enthusiasm for the independent expression of their ideals, eager to go forward and begin their career, but they are frequently discouraged at meetings of the alumnae association to find that business is repeatedly stressed, and petty details are projected which we all know must be taken care of, but which are the cause of much discord. They are, in fact, deserving of serious consideration, but should be kept in the background, carried on by mail or by special personal appeals and explanations, rather than kept in the foreground, emphasized and agitated, by those who would force issues. These are not the all important things to be stressed; instead, the educative program should be emphasized, the program which offers the opportunity for advancement to the individual nurse. We have all experienced at some time how petty fault findings, criticisms, and misunderstandings that accumulate and become magnified to tremendous proportions, can be quickly forgotten, forgiven, regretted, and banished in the light of some big inspiring piece of work to do, so splendid that only the best in us responds. Then comes the harmonious working together of those

who before were resented, but are now accepted in this new enthusiasm. Where is there greater opportunity for rare accomplishments than in this twentieth century of nursing? Can we hope to achieve less than women in other lines of work are doing? Are we to be handicapped by the very things that give us our right to call ourselves professional women? With so many open doors and so much that is fine for women to do, it should make of our ethical problems one of prevention if we keep in the foreground the opportunities waiting for us in the glorified field of nursing that calls for the best we can give in unity, sincerity, and loyalty.

SEATTLE—OUR NEXT CONVENTION CITY

Dr. Woods Hutchinson, in describing the Puget Sound country, says: "It is the charmed land of the American continent, where a temperate sun, a mild climate, and fertile soil give men the stimulus of the green and rain-swept north, with the luxurious returns for moderate effort of the teeming tropics; the most restful and soothing climate in the world."

Your impression of Seattle varies with your method of approach. If you travel by motor you will come along well paved country highways, through giant forests and beautiful farming valleys. If you come by train you learn that Seattle is the leading railroad center for the Pacific Coast, and that you may travel over the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, Union Pacific, Canadian Pacific, or the Southern Pacific, or by a boat connection, over the Grand Trunk Pacific.

Perhaps the best way to first meet Seattle is to approach it on the still, blue waters of Puget Sound. Before you, above the broad waters of Elliott Bay, in the most picturesque setting in the world, looms a modern city,—a city wide flung over the hills, spread against a distant background of snow-clad peaks that reach from Mt. Baker, near the Canadian line, to Mt. Rainier, to the southward. This is a picture never entirely dismissed from the memory of any traveler who has witnessed it.

Such a city in such a setting must be a city of homes. The owner of a home has a pride in the beauty of the city and in the beauty of his home. Lawns, evergreen trees, shrubbery, roses, and climbing vines are as beautiful to one's view in the modest bungalow street as they are in the most exclusive residence district. Flowers bloom the year around and the climate contributes to the beauty of the picture with that characteristic green of trees and grass that gave Washington the sobriquet, the "Evergreen State."

Seattle has the educational facilities of the best modern cities. The campus of the University of Washington is one of the most beautiful in the world and spreads over 500 acres of the rising heights of Lake Washington. It provides a University home for 5,000 students.

Elmer Gray described Seattle in Scribner's magazine as follows: "I am writing now after having just seen Seattle, and my pen falters in consequence, for I know not how to express all the wonderful beauty seen in one day's automobiling over the winding drives and roaming afoot through the dark green forest parks of Seattle's suburbs."